

with what the world or our impatient companions expect. We have to recall ourselves from these alluring excursions into worldly methods and aims, and to realize that, in our Lord's own mind, the greatest glory and the final climax of His method

lay in the great spiritual miracle, which far transcended those of the physical sphere, that the 'poor,'—and we must give the word its most extended meaning,—the poor had the gospel preached to them.

## Recent Johannine Literature.

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### I. Ramsay on the Apocalypse.<sup>1</sup>

ONCE more Professor Ramsay has laid students of the Apostolic Age under a deep debt. He never touches a subject without giving its study a fresh and vital impulse. He is pre-eminently a pioneer. Indeed, his chief defects are those natural to a pioneer: he tends to push his new line of progress too far, and to overlook other though less fresh lines of explanation. So is it here in his treatment of the Apocalypse in terms of the archæology of the Roman province of Asia. He views its writer as if quite naturalized to his new environment. He forgets far too readily how intensely Jewish, as distinct from Greek, John was and remained; and he does so largely because he approaches him after such long and intense preoccupation with Paul, the born provincial. But how fruitful are his suggestions! There is more to learn from his slips than from another's formal correctitude within narrow limits of thought and feeling. Ramsay has a larger outlook, a profounder humanity than any other writer in his field; and the perusal of his pages gives one the feeling of passing from a close study into the open air, where the actual full-blooded life of men has its being. It is, moreover, a book which can be read with equal pleasure and profit by the general reader and the specialist.

Take the opening sentences of his Preface. 'In the contact of East and West originates the movement of history. The historical position of Christianity cannot be rightly understood except in its relation to that immemorial meeting and conflict.' How much food for thought do these words supply? Later we read: 'Only a divine

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters to the Seven Churches.* By Professor W. M. Ramsay. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904. Pp. xx, 446. Price 12s.

origin is competent to explain the perfect union of Eastern and Western thought in this religion. . . . The adaptation of Christianity to the double nationality can be best seen in the Apocalypse, because there the two elements which unite in Christianity are less perfectly reconciled than in any other book of the New Testament. The Judaic element in the Apocalypse has been hitherto studied to the entire neglect of the Greek element in it. Hence it has been the most misunderstood book in the New Testament.' In these last two sentences we have some of the exaggeration which has helped to make certain scholars, particularly abroad, so blind to Ramsay's high services. Especially is it misleading to attribute the misunderstanding of the book to study of the Judaic element therein. That is what has recently helped to bring it out of the twilight in which it has lain for nearly eighteen hundred years; and more light has yet to break forth from that quarter. Still though the inmost structure of its writer's mind was determined by Jewish feeling and training, many allusions in the Apocalypse, especially in the Messages (not 'Letters,' for here Ramsay goes off largely on a wrong tack) in chaps. ii. iii., are only to be understood in their true historical sense when placed in a setting furnished by the actual conditions of life in the province of Asia. But Ramsay makes a serious mistake when he says: 'It was written to be understood by the Græco-Asiatic public; and the Figures [given in his text to illustrate Asiatic ideas and usages, religious in the main] prove that it was natural and easy for those readers to understand the symbolism.' On the contrary, it was written, not for 'the public,' but for special esoteric circles in Græco-Asiatic society, whose chief chance of understanding much of the form and symbolism of such a special literary phenomenon

lay in what they did *not* share with their fellow-citizens, but rather with the Jewish Scriptures, apocryphal as well as canonical. A glance at Westcott and Hort's edition, which indicates Old Testament allusions in special type, demonstrates this. It is strange that Ramsay has so lost sight of the Christians in Asia as 'elect sojourners of the Dispersion,' as they are styled in the Epistle addressed to them by Peter, a man whose attitude to pagan society was more akin to John's than was Paul's. I can see little or no evidence that John had that quick sense for the Christian Church sojourning in an Asian city, as in spiritual solidarity with the life of such a city, itself determined by topography and local history, which our author possesses and in turn attributes to him. For what came under his own direct observation as a social factor conditioning the habits of his fellow-Christians in each city, John had doubtless a keen eye; and Ramsay has done exceeding well in bringing this out in connexion with the 'Nicolaitans,' however one may question whether he has not put too favourable a face upon their actual practices, so giving an unduly harsh appearance to the seer's denunciation of them. But that is another thing from saying that 'the Apocalypse reads the history and the fate of the churches in the natural features, the relations of earth and sea, winds and mountains, which affected the cities.' To our thinking, his most valuable elucidation of the Apocalypse from archæological data, is the light he casts on the hitherto obscure description of 'the beast from the land' as promoting the worship of 'the beast from the sea,' in 13<sup>11-18</sup>. This, as he shows, refers to the zealous initiative of the province of Asia, through its *Commune* or Council, for religious purposes in particular, in the matter of promoting and exacting Cæsar-worship. But I suspect that here our author has not applied with sufficient strictness what this passage, so expounded, really teaches us as to the province of Asia, as distinct from the central imperial government, when he connects this zeal with the imperial policy of Domitian in his later years. For the whole point of the passage is the local nature of the initiative; and there is no sign that it had as yet received the formal sanction of the emperor. In fact, it is possible that this excess of zeal was discountenanced when it reached the ears of the emperor; that the persecution on these lines, and to the degree of intensity feared

in the Apocalypse, was never carried through to the end; and that this is the reason why we do not hear of it outside the seer's pages. Of course such a view depends somewhat on our theory as to the emperor of the day, and so on the date of the Book. I can here only say, that study of Ramsay's book, and of the inconsistencies which from time to time emerge in his candid presentation of various aspects of the picture, has confirmed me in the belief that it was written early in Vespasian's reign, and not under Domitian at all. Such a view alone makes the common authorship of the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel, which Ramsay attributes also to John the Apostle, psychologically conceivable. As to that dual authorship I concur with his judgment, and consider that he has done much to clear away prejudices clinging to its discussion. But such an authorship within one and the same decade of an aged author's life, seems to me out of the question; and I would fain hope that Ramsay may yet come to view the phenomena of persecution as compatible with the earlier date, as he seems to have done in the case of 1 Peter.

Ramsay justly argues that the phrase, 'The seven churches that are in Asia,' without further explanation, in the opening address of the Apocalypse, implies that such a special group was recognized in the local Christian parlance; but his explanation of the fact is unsatisfying. He regards their distinction from other Asian churches as 'in some way connected with the principal road-circuit of the Province.' In fact, they stood 'on a very important circular route, which starts from Ephesus, goes round what may be called Asia *par excellence*, the most educated and wealthy and historically pre-eminent part of the Province. They were the best points on that circuit to serve as centres of communication with seven districts.' This may be true enough in fact; yet it is too accidental a basis for their being addressed as typical of the needs of the Asian churches. The theory does not square with what Ramsay himself says elsewhere touching the Messages to the provincial Church as couched in terms of the conditions of the Seven, as known to the seer. May it not rather be that they were 'the Seven (original) churches' of any note, going back to 'the beginning of the gospel,' when it spread from Paul's mission in Ephesus; and that this their historical pre-eminence became crystal-

lized in the phrase in question? They were, perhaps, the seven original Pauline churches, founded by his personal friends and disciples, when, as Ac 19<sup>10</sup> has it, 'all the dwellers in Asia heard the word of God.' Such a view renders unnecessary the rather over-elaborate organization, postal and otherwise, which Ramsay infers from the phrase on his theory.

While, then, it seems likely that not a few of the bold and taking suggestions of this book will require modification or correction, yet it so teems with fine observations as enormously to advance our knowledge of the conditions implied by the Apocalypse, as well as of its essential spirit and message. It has the peculiar vital quality that marks all Ramsay's work and has given him the key to so many New Testament difficulties. Where he fails, it is usually owing to defective grasp of Jewish literature, specially in its apocalyptic forms. For instance, the Apocalypse of Baruch, which includes a Letter to Jews at large, affords a parallel to this feature of John's Apocalypse which makes a good deal in chap. iv. seem beside the mark. But where knowledge of Græco-Roman society and its atmosphere of thought and feeling can bear on the New Testament, there he remains a master, perhaps the master of the surest sense at present with us. Accordingly, we may conclude with some words which he speaks where his authority is greatest: 'No one, who is capable of appreciating the tone and thought of different periods, could place the composition of any of the Books of the New Testament in the time of the Antonines (*i.e.* after 138 A.D.), unless he were imperfectly informed on the character and spirit of that period.'

## II. Dr. Drummond on John's Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

This is a valuable contribution to a truly great problem—great because of the many elements entering into its final solution. The inquiry is that of a mind possessing two at least of the elements most needful to success, *viz.* the judicial temper and spiritual insight. When to these is added large and exact learning, we may expect the inquiry at any rate to leave the field clearer of confusions and false scents than it found it.

<sup>1</sup> *The Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel.* By James Drummond, Principal of Manchester College. Oxford: Williams & Norgate, 1903. Pp. xviii, 528. Price ros. 6d.

And such is the case. The external evidence which has for some time pointed steadily to a date in the closing years of the first century, and indeed to the Apostle John as author in some real sense, is here set forth with great fairness and power. The internal evidence, too, is handled freshly and carefully, along the familiar lines, which narrow down the authorship to a Palestinian Jew who was in some degree at least an eye-witness. At this point the external and internal forms of evidence combine 'to preclude the supposition of a late Greek authorship.' When, too, we 'remember the cumulative character of each, it seems to me,' says Dr. Drummond, 'that we have an amount of proof of the Johannine authorship which ought to command our assent, unless very strong evidence can be produced upon the other side' (p. 384). He then proceeds to examine 'the objections to the traditional view' with a fulness and patience which seldom mark the criticism of the positive arguments by those who favour a negative conclusion on the point. But, beyond this, he makes a weighty contribution to the logic of the whole controversy, in showing the precariousness of the 'argument from silence' as often applied in the face of probabilities established by general literary analogies. Accordingly, allowing for a certain unconscious development of the ideal side of the teaching once heard from his Master, which must have gone on in the apostle's vital experience and have influenced his way of putting some things in a gospel that was no mere narrative, but an implicit argument for faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (20<sup>81</sup>), Dr. Drummond concludes that the apostolic authorship is the least difficult of theories in view of all the facts, fairly dealt with according to their relative weight.

But while the inquiry as a whole leaves one very strongly under this impression, there is one element of weakness in the picture he draws, the serious, if not fatal, character of which its author does not seem duly to realize. It emerges in the fourth chapter, entitled 'How far is the Gospel Historical?' and again towards the end (pp. 426 ff.). The question affects both the speeches and the events which it records. The main test in view is the Synoptic narrative, from which the Fourth Gospel diverges, or seems to diverge, on several important matters. The most crucial of these, allowing for all tricks of memory, are certain

matters of fact. On one, the date of the Last Supper, Dr. Drummond sums up rather in John's favour. On the rest his verdict is mostly adverse. As to several of these, *e.g.* the four visits to Jerusalem unrecorded in the Synoptic narrative, and the cleansing of the Temple during the first of the two Pascal visits (our text of Jn 6<sup>4</sup>, which implies a third, is contradicted by weighty second-century witnesses), I cannot agree with that verdict. But we will narrow the issue to the crucial point, the raising of Lazarus, which Dr. Drummond unhesitatingly rejects as history, suggesting that it may 'be designed to set forth in a vivid and picturesque form the truth that Jesus is the resurrection and the life' (p. 64). I need not stay to criticise his examination of this apparent event as a historian. It seems to me quite inconclusive. In fact, Dr. Drummond's mind is already made up *à priori* as a philosopher and a physicist, as he frankly states on p. 426. But I would put it to him and others most earnestly, that he cannot expect many thoughtful minds permanently to stand where he stands logically. This is not a matter of 'a large ideal or allegorical element'—which is frankly present in the Gospel—but of a confusion of the factual and the ideal of a kind and to a degree which must forfeit our respect for its writer, both intellectually and morally. It is no good beating about the bush. Put it in as fine a spirit as you may (*e.g.* on p. 429), and we come at last to this, as Dr. Marcus Dods has it (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i. 679): 'The writer professes to produce certain facts which have powerfully influenced the minds of men and have

produced faith,' in the hope that they may help to produce or deepen faith in others (20<sup>31</sup>). 'If these pretended facts were fictions,' if 'to accomplish his purpose he invents incidents,' 'then the writer is dishonest'; and nothing can save the spiritual power of his work from decay. It boots not to affirm that 'the notion of imposture in connexion with such a work cannot be entertained.' We welcome this as the instinctive conviction of such a man as Dr. Drummond; but he has failed to show how it can be a reasoned conviction. To do so he must go farther, or not so far. As an historian he has no *locus standi* where he would fain abide. He has not shown, or even attempted to show, *how* an eye-witness could record such an incident under the impression that it had once been enacted. To do this would be to secure consistency for his position, and so plausibility. Failing this, if he cannot sacrifice his (necessarily provisional) philosophy, so as to recognize facts transcending experience as historically unimpeachable, he must sacrifice the historical arguments which now seem to him to postulate an eye-witness and an apostle as author. This is no case of 'misunderstood metaphor' hardened into fact, as might be the case where another mind has intervened. It is memory, or it is fiction. Dr. Drummond has failed to face this issue, which is now the crucial one touching the Fourth Gospel; and for this reason his noble monograph attains no satisfying unity. It remains but a valuable collection of materials and of judgments in detail, aids to the student on his path towards a consistent theory.

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

#### ACTS XXIV. 16.

'Herein do I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men alway.'—R.V.

#### EXPOSITION.

'Herein.'—That is 'for this reason,' because of his belief in the future resurrection; or, in other words, because he held the doctrine of the resurrection of the just and unjust, not as a mere speculative doctrine, but as a grave and awful reality.—Howson.

'I also.'—As well as my accusers and the Jews whom they represent.—PAGE.

'Do exercise myself.'—This verb is used twice in the *Iliad* meaning to *work raw material* into some object, to *form curiously by art* as a bowl, or a chariot finely wrought with gold. Hence to *adorn*, then to *practise* athletic arts, to discipline, to *train* as the human soul into its perfection. It implies training one's self, as in an art that requires practice for its perfection.—PELOUBET.

'To have a conscience void of offence toward God and men.'—*Ἀπρόσκοπον* is excellently translated *void of offence*, for the word may have two meanings: (1) *not stum-*